



U.S Representative

Bernie Sanders

A Special Focus On Women's Issues



Spring 1998



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

DEAR FELLOW VERMONT,

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep you informed about some of the important issues affecting women that Congress is (or is not) dealing with. I hope you find it useful.

As you may know, women workers earn only 73.8% of what men workers make. Further, most of the minimum wage workers in this country are women, many of whom are struggling to raise families on totally inadequate wages. That is why the economic policies developed by Congress are so important for women.

I am proud to have played a leadership role in the 1996 fight to raise the minimum wage, and I will do all that I can to see that it is raised again. The real, inflation-adjusted level of the minimum wage today is far below where it was 30 years ago, and we must continue the struggle to see that every employee in America who works 40 hours a week lives above the poverty line. The so-called "economic boom" has made the wealthiest people in America richer than ever before. Now, we must make certain that **all** American workers have a decent standard of living.

Given the fact that 60% of women are now in the workforce, I am supporting strong Congressional action to address the crisis in child care that exists in Vermont and throughout the country. Parents have the right to know that they can hold down a job, and that their children can enjoy quality childcare at an affordable cost.

In recent years, Congress has made some progress in addressing the epidemic of domestic violence. The Violence Against Women Act has pumped substantial funds into Vermont and other states for emergency shelters, prevention programs, victim's rights and improved law enforcement approaches. But more needs to be done. That is why I am an original co-sponsor of the Violence Against Women Act of 1998 - which will improve and expand the original legislation.

For years, women's health concerns were largely ignored in Washington. I am happy to report that, as a result of a strong grassroots movement, that situation has been significantly improved. But we need to continue our vigilance. Not only must we adequately fund research into better understanding and treating breast cancer, as well as other women specific diseases, but we must more vigorously address the growing problem of heart disease in women.

Lastly, while I fully understand that Vermonters have honest differences of opinion over the abortion issue, I remain firmly pro-choice. It is my belief that it is wrong for the federal government to interfere in the very personal decision a woman must make regarding her pregnancy. That decision must be left to the woman, her physician and her family.

If there are any questions that my office can answer, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our toll free number in Burlington is 1-800-339-9834. Also, you can receive information about what I am doing in Congress on my web site at www.house.gov/bernie.

Sincerely,

Bernard Sanders
Member of Congress

Stopping Domestic Violence

The incidence of domestic violence in Vermont and America is cause for alarm. Nearly one in three adult women will be a victim of domestic violence at some point, and eight percent of women report physical abuse by their current partners. In 1993, 575,000 men were arrested for violence against women and 1,300 women were reportedly killed in instances of domestic violence.

This is an issue which must engage us all. Four years ago, passage of the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA) took a great step forward in lifting the stigma surrounding survivors of domestic violence. That legislation was aimed at dealing with the problem of domestic violence by prosecuting crimes against women and putting their perpetrators in jail, creating shelters and safe havens for battered women, and establishing a national hotline for victims of abuse. **I am pleased to report Vermont has received more than \$5.3 million in grants through VAWA.**

The Violence Against Women Act of 1998, or VAWA II, reauthorizes those important programs with \$2.3 billion over five years, including \$1 billion for battered women's shelters, more money for law enforcement and prosecution grants, training for judges and court employees, and additional funding for professional victims' counselors. It also provides \$1.6 billion in new funding - some of which will be released through competitive grants. Once this bill becomes law, I look forward to helping Vermont law enforcement and women's organizations apply for and win those grants. This legislation also seeks to prevent violence from occurring by providing training for counselors and medical personnel and funding for anti-rape education. It also includes new legislation to protect older and disabled women from abuse. I am one of 70 House sponsors for this important bill, and will be working hard to ensure its passage.

VAWA II includes two pieces of legislation I originally introduced last year, including the Victims of Abuse Insurance Protection Act.

Insurance companies have used domestic violence to deny coverage to battered women and to increase the charge for health, life, disability, homeowners and other insurance. State surveys in Pennsylvania and Kansas both found that 24% of responding insurance companies admit to such discrimination, and I know of two cases in Vermont. This discrimination against battered women works to silence people we should be encouraging to come forward and seek justice. My legislation prohibits insurance companies from discriminating against victims of domestic violence. We should do all we can to ensure victims of abuse seek help and get away from their batterers. Instead, insurance companies are battering battered women all over again. That's wrong, and this bill will help put a stop to it.

My second provision in VAWA II is House Concurrent Resolution 29, which calls for a National Summit on Sports and Domestic Violence. Sports figures are often emulated on and off the field, and national and collegiate sports leaders have a responsibility to speak out and publicly condemn domestic violence and sexual assault. As role models, male athletes can send a strong message to boys throughout the country that the rough and tumble, hard-nosed competition stops when players leave the field, and there is no excuse for domestic violence and sexual assault.

A Living Wage Is a Woman's Issue

We live in a time marked by a growing disparity in the distribution of wealth in America, a time in which more people are working longer hours - and often, more than one job - for wages that are not keeping pace with the rising cost of living.

Women feel these economic pressures acutely. In 1996, the median annual income for women was just 73.8 percent of what it was for men, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research. That same year, according to the Economic Policy Institute, 37.4 percent of female workers were earning poverty-level wages or less. A majority of minimum-wage workers are women.

We can begin to correct this situation by raising the minimum wage to a reasonable level. This is one of my top legislative priorities. Real wages for Americans have declined by more than 15% since 1973. For the minimum wage to provide the same purchasing power today as it had in 1968, it would have to be \$7.22 an hour. The current level is \$5.15.

From the day I began work in Congress, I have been helping to lead the fight to increase the minimum wage. Last year, I introduced HR 2278, The Livable Wage Act, which raises the minimum wage to \$6.50 an hour and provides for annual cost of living adjustments. While we must go further and provide for annual cost of living increases in step with inflation so the purchasing power of the minimum wage does not erode further, President Clinton has taken an important first step in calling for a \$1.00 increase, from \$5.15 to \$6.15. While raising the minimum wage is important to all American workers, it is especially important to the 58% of minimum wage workers who are women.

The working people of Vermont and America deserve a raise, and I will do all I can to make sure they get it.

PAY EQUITY DATA				
Women's Earnings as a Percentage of Men's Earnings 1960-1996 (in 1996 Dollars)				
Year	Women	Men	\$ Difference	%
1996	\$23,710	\$32,144	\$8,434	74%
1990	\$23,795	\$33,226	\$9,431	72%
1985	\$22,783	\$35,281	\$12,498	65%
1980	\$21,346	\$35,483	\$14,137	60%
1975	\$20,950	\$35,618	\$14,668	59%
1970	\$20,222	\$34,062	\$13,840	59%
1965	\$17,562	\$29,306	\$11,744	60%
1960	\$15,870	\$26,156	\$10,286	61%
Source: National Committee on Pay Equity				

DEFENDING FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

I appreciate and respect the very strong views Vermonters hold on both sides of the abortion debate, but I have always believed it is wrong for the federal government to interfere in the very personal decision a woman must make regarding whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.



I am pleased to report that efforts to constitutionally ban all abortions have largely failed for the time being, and a proposed constitutional amendment to ban abortion has been defeated in Congress several times.

Anti-choice advocates have responded by changing their strategy, focusing instead on efforts to ban specific surgical procedures and federal funding of abortions for low-income and other women. Limitations on the choice of low-income women discriminate against those who are most vulnerable, rendering the promise of free choice empty for those who must rely on the government for their health insurance.

Medicaid: Restrictions on Medicaid funding of abortions essentially deny freedom of choice to low-income women. In my view, this not only denies choice to low-income women but also causes other problems; According to the American Medical Association, this restriction makes it more likely that women will undergo abortion procedures that can endanger their health or continue a potentially health-threatening pregnancy. This ban on Medicaid

funding has been renewed annually, in various forms, since 1981. As part of last year's budget bill, which I opposed, Congress voted to make it a permanent ban.

Women in the Military: The military offers health coverage to its personnel, retirees and their dependents through the TRICARE program and military hospitals. Anti-choice members of Congress have passed legislation prohibiting this insurance program from paying for abortions, except to save the life of the mother. In 1996, Congress passed legislation which permanently prohibits American servicewomen stationed overseas from even using their own money to obtain abortions at military facilities except in cases of rape or incest.

Federal Employees: Approximately 1.1 million women of reproductive age who are either federal employees, retirees or their dependents rely on the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program for their health care. These women cannot obtain abortions through their health insurance except in cases of rape, incest, or to save the mother's life.

District of Columbia Residents: As in Vermont and the rest of the nation, DC cannot use its federal Medicaid funds to provide abortions for low-income women. However, unlike the case in the rest of America, federal law prohibits the DC government from using DC residents' locally-raised taxes to provide abortion services.

Intact D & E: Congress has voted several times to ban intact dialation and extraction, also known as "late-term" abortion or intact d & e. Legislation to ban intact d & e passed the House of Representatives most recently by 295 to 136 last year. The President vetoed the bill, which I also opposed, and a vote on whether to override his veto will probably occur this summer.

On this issue, I agree with the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, which said in a January 12, 1997 Statement of Policy, "An intact D&E ... may be the best or most appropriate procedure in a particular circumstance to save the life or preserve the health of a woman, and only the doctor, in consultation with the patient, based upon the woman's particular circumstances can make this decision. The potential exists that legislation prohibiting specific medical practices, such as intact D&E, may outlaw techniques that are critical to the lives and health of American women. **The intervention of legislative bodies into medical decision making is inappropriate, ill advised, and dangerous.**"

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** If you recieve more than one copy of this newsletter we apologize. Please feel free to pass the extra copy along to an interested friend. **
** This mailing was prepared, published, and mailed at taxpayer expense. **

A Nation That Values Families Will Help Provide Child Care

Many Vermont families cannot survive on only one salary. For them, as well as families headed by a single parent, child care has become as necessary as groceries. But too often, childcare is prohibitively expensive. Half of America's parents with young children earn less than \$35,000 per year - full-time minimum-wage earners make less than \$11,000 per year. Meanwhile, child care can cost \$4,000 to \$10,000 per year for one child.

Working parents worry about the quality of child care too. Child care centers pay some of the lowest wages in America and often have difficulty attracting qualified care givers. The Children's Defense Fund estimates 40 percent of infant and toddler rooms in child care centers have defects that could jeopardize children's safety and development.



I support the President's initiative to increase child care funding by \$21.7 billion over five years, including substantial increases in child care quality control, school-age care funding, funding increases for the Head Start program, and tax credits encouraging employers to pay for child care. Hard-working parents should not have to worry about their children's safety.

Phone Numbers of Interest To Vermont Women

For information and updates concerning the work I am doing in Congress as well as town meetings and conferences I will be holding in Vermont, visit my Web Page on the Internet at: www.house.gov/bernie

Vermont Governor's Commission on Women.....802-828-2851

Vermont Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Abuse.....802-651-1663

Vermont Department of Health, Maternal and Child Health.....802-863-7270

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Regional Office.....617-565-3100

Vermont Department of Labor and Industry, Wage & Hour Division...802-828-2157

Vermont Human Rights Commission.....802-828-2480